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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: IRAQ BORDER: TURKEY SAYS WILL BEGIN HABUR GATE
RENOVATION IN FEBRUARY

REF: ANKARA 7444

Sensitive but Unclassified -- not for internet distribution.

[11.](#) (SBU) The director of Turkey's Customs service, Under Secretary Nevzat Sayglioglu, told Econ Counselor that his

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agency has taken the necessary steps, including increasing customs personnel and addressing security issues, to improve the processing of traffic between Iraq and Turkey at the Habur Gate border crossing. However, he avoided stating that the improvements will result in Turkey meeting its commitment to increase daily truck processing to 1,850, as agreed to in the December talks with Iraqi officials (reftel). (Processing into Turkey has improved somewhat but remains below 1,500 per day.) He said the infrastructure at the border facilities was the main problem. Other problems included 1) local Turks making day trips across the border, presumably involved in suitcase trade or smuggling, 2) the erratic flow of trucks from the Iraqi side -- sometimes there are no trucks ready to enter the processing area, he said, 3) the limited working hours of UN officials at the border, and 4) the desire of Turkish drivers to remain on the Turkish side of the border rather than cross into Iraq at night. Sayglioglu later admitted another potential problem: Turkish Customs officials do their paperwork between 4 and 7 each morning.

[12.](#) (SBU) Sayglioglu said Turkey shared the U.S. desire to improve the border traffic, especially to accommodate Turkey's rapidly growing trade with Iraq. He announced that construction to expand and modernize the Habur Gate border facilities will commence in February, with completion expected in July. Sayglioglu noted that the border processed nearly 5,000 trucks per day before the first Gulf War, and he hoped that the improvements would mean as many as 7,000 trucks a day crossing the border.

[13.](#) (SBU) The construction will be managed by the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB) under a Build, Operate, Transfer scheme. The plans, which Sayglioglu showed us, call for 12 lanes each way and automatic scales at each processing point, and will include a small hotel and other facilities for the truck drivers. Sayglioglu explained that construction will not mean closing the border; instead, work will commence on half of the outbound and inbound facilities, leaving the border fully operating, but with fewer lanes. He acknowledged that the construction will create problems but promised to work hard to solve these.

[14.](#) (U) Sayglioglu said that Customs is ready to move ahead on a second border crossing and will discuss next steps with Iraqi officials at their meeting January 20-23 meeting in Silopi.

[15.](#) (SBU) Comment: This is not the first time Turkish officials have told us construction work at Habur Gate is imminent. We will follow up with TOBB to learn if Sayglioglu's projection is accurate.

Baghdad Minimize Considered.
DEUTSCH